

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

APRIL 1, 1880.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. McMILLAN, from the Committee on Commerce, submitted the following

REPORT:

The Committee on Commerce, to which was referred the memorial of Merrick, Fowler & Esseltyne and other business men and firms of Michigan, praying for the appointment of a marine statistician, has considered the same and respectfully submits the following report:

The memorial was submitted to the Secretary of the Treasury for his examination, and his opinion upon the whole matter was requested. The Secretary of the Treasury, in his reply, expresses the opinion that the appointment of a marine statistician, as prayed for in the memorial, is not necessary, and that the work of the collection of statistics of marine disasters is now done under the direction of the General Superintendent of the Life-Saving Service.

A full and satisfactory account of this branch of the service is given by the Secretary of the Treasury, and in view of the statements of the Secretary in his answer, which is herewith submitted, and the present condition of the service, the committee is of opinion that the prayer of the memorialists should not be granted. The committee, therefore, reports back the memorial and asks to be discharged from its further consideration.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT, OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
Washington, D. C., March 16, 1880.

SIR: In reply to your letter of the 9th instant, inclosing for my examination a memorial praying that a bill may be passed for the appointment of a marine statistician charged with the duty of compiling the statistics of the loss of life and property throughout the Lake region, &c., and requesting my opinion upon the whole matter, I have the honor to transmit the following statement:

Previous to the act of June 20, 1874 (Statutes at Large, vol. 18, chap. 344), there was no provision in this country for the collection of statistics of marine disaster, but sections 10, 11, and 12 of that act furnished the authority under which this department has since made such collection, which has been annually compiled and published. The work is now done under the direction of the General Superintendent of the Life-Saving Service, in accordance with the provision of section 7 of the act of June 18, 1878 (Statutes at Large, vol. 20, chap. 265, page 164), and the compilation is included in the annual report of that officer. One of these annual statements (marked A), showing the manner in which these compilations are made, is herewith inclosed. It will be observed that the tables are so arranged as to show at a glance to the various classes of persons interested the particular kind of information each may desire, the general plan being the same as has for years been pursued by other maritime nations and which has been found by experience to answer all the requirements of commercial interests.

As the memorial alleges that the system employed fails to attain the desired end, it

is deemed proper to show the manner in which the collection of these statistics is made. The paper marked B is a copy of the general circular issued by the department to collectors of customs and all other persons concerned, containing the law which makes it obligatory upon all managing owners, agents, and masters of vessels to furnish formal information in regard to marine disasters involving loss of life, serious injury to persons, or material damage to property, and affixes a penalty for their non-compliance. The paper marked C is a blank form of wreck report, a supply of which is furnished by the collectors of customs to vessels clearing and entering at their ports, to enable them to comply with the requirements of the law. The paper marked D is a blank form of letter used by the department to obtain, through the officers of the customs, further information in regard to any marine casualty or disaster, when the report received from owner, agent, or master is found defective in any particular. The paper marked E is a blank form of letter in use by the department to obtain, through the customs officers, information from owners, agents, or masters in regard to marine casualties or disasters of which the department has been unofficially informed as hereinafter shown. The keepers of life-saving stations are also required to furnish full reports, upon forms provided for the purpose, of all wrecks or disasters occurring within the scope of their operations. Information is also derived from the Steamboat Inspection Service, whose officers are required to report all such occurrences to steam-vessels within their respective districts; from the light-house establishment, which receives returns of disaster to shipping; from the office of the register of the Treasury, where the registers of all vessels of the United States which are lost are surrendered; and from the State Department through its consular officers, who make returns of all disasters to United States shipping in foreign waters. A system of exchange of wreck returns is also established and in operation between this and every maritime nation. In addition to these official sources, the department has access through courtesy to the copious information contained in the monthly list of disasters obtained by the Bureau Veritas, an organization established for the very purpose of obtaining this and all other information pertinent to shipping, and to most, if not all, periodicals published in this country in maritime and seafaring interests, and aiming to give lists of all marine disasters. As is well known, all the cities upon the sea and lakes support commercial newspapers which give special prominence to shipping news, including disasters, and to these the department has access. The official returns obtained from the collectors of customs under the law are compared with all reports received from all these sources, and whenever it is found that the required official returns of any of the reported disasters have not been furnished, they are called for by the paper marked E. The memorial does not show how it is proposed to improve upon the present system of obtaining information, and it is difficult to conjecture by what means this information could be more fully and accurately gathered.

The results now obtained are believed to be entirely satisfactory. Although the published compilation (paper marked A) consists of abstracts, the names of the vessels and the particulars of the disasters not being given, as this course would involve the publication annually of a bulky volume, all persons interested know that the full original reports in each case are on file in the department and accessible to them. Whenever any information is wanted in reference to a particular vessel, inquiry is made here and a copy furnished, and, up to this date, no such inquiry has ever been made without receiving a satisfactory answer. With one exception, the memorial is the first instance in which the sufficiency of the system has been questioned. In the case referred to, the memorial to Congress of a single individual, asking for the improvement of a certain harbor, after quoting from the compilation (paper marked A) the disasters reported to have happened in the vicinity of that harbor, asserted that there were many others which the compilation did not embrace. Being requested to furnish the names of the vessels which he asserted were not included, he produced a short list, when it appeared that the disasters he had referred to occurred at other localities, some of them very remote, and were all correctly included in the compilation. A year ago the department had access to a list of marine disasters purporting to have occurred upon Lake Huron and Georgian Bay during the season of navigation for 1878, prepared by a gentleman in Michigan who enjoyed considerable distinction in that region as a marine reporter or statistician. Upon examining his list, it was found that he had twenty cases of alleged casualty of which this department had not received official returns. In each of these cases an examination was made, and the required report officially called for. It turned out that in some instances there were no such vessels as the list specified; in several, no casualties had occurred; and in all the rest, with a single exception, the damage was so slight as to be of no consequence, and to not fall within the law. In the case of the exception, the agents reported the damage to be one-fourth of what was asserted in the list referred to, although it was their interest to make it as large as it actually was, being fully covered by insurance. The experience of the department shows that the system does substantially attain its end, although it is probable that it fails to obtain the statistics of some disasters to foreign vessels on the Canadian shores of the lakes, as these do not fall within the

reach of the law. Arrangements, however, are being made by which it is hoped to obtain from Canadian authorities all desired information.

The expense attending the collection of the statistics and their compilation is not great, as is asserted by the memorial, but is, on the contrary, inconsiderable, especially when considered in connection with the admitted value of the work, and it is believed to be less than would be possible under any other system of any value.

From the foregoing you will see that, in my opinion, the establishment of the proposed office of marine statistician for the lake region is not necessary.

The memorial is herewith returned.

Very respectfully,

JOHN SHERMAN,
Secretary.

H. M. S. J. R. McMILLAN,

Subcommittee of Committee on Commerce, United States Senate.

